



Yintong talks to...

Richard Song, managing director of Anglo Chinese Executive (ACE) Travel

Bringing the Chinese to Britain

Richard (Jie) Song is a new generation entrepreneur who has witnessed both the dramatic growth of the Chinese economy and the country's demographic changes from a consumers' point of view for the last 15 years.

Song was born in Kaifeng, a historic city in Henan Province, and moved to Beijing to take a business studies course. He stayed in the capital after graduation and joined an education company. Overseas education has been an extremely lucrative business in China since the 90s and overall the firm was generating billions of yuan. However, the section which looked after governmental foreign visits, where Song worked, was less profitable and was eventually dissolved. Undeterred he set up China Perfect Travel which specialised in overseas tourism for government officials.

Building credibility

Having decided early on to focus on the UK as the key destination, Song threw himself into connecting with relevant organisations and building credibility. He soon found that working with large government organisations could present challenges for a small business. Changes in personnel could mean the loss of a hard-earned connection, causing communication problems and putting existing projects in jeopardy. Slow payments caused by hierarchical structures drained his funds and produced cashflow problems. Making enough profit to keep the office afloat was Song's priority and with determination and hard work he led his team into its second five-year plan by 2010.

That year, with the 2012 Olympics in his sights, Song set up a London office – his company now had a re-brand and new name, Anglo Chinese Executive Travel – to liaise with his six locations in China. “2012 was a monumental year for Britain, it was also a critical landmark for ACE Travel” Song told me. “The level of tourism to the UK generated by the Olympics was explosive and



it hasn't stopped increasing since. We benefited greatly – not only did we achieve tremendous revenue that year, it also established our position as the 'go-to' company for all types of tourists from China.”

Exponential

With the exponential development of social media and mobile communication – in the Chinese market in particular – ACE Travel was quick to participate. Since 2015, they have been putting resources continuously into substantiating their own app as well as introducing service packages through popular platforms such as Mafengwo, in addition to their comprehensive website.

Known as 'Mr. Britain' for his knowledge of the country Richard Song is forever digging deep to discover new, hidden places of interest and develop sophisticated travel packages to accommodate customers' changing tastes. For example, ACE Travel – with 70 full time staff

rising to over 100 in the summer – teamed up with Chinese speaking lecturers in the UK to offer museum tours, now number one in on-line search lists. As a result, ACE is one of the top tour operators for Chinese visitors. From June to August last year it handled more than 100 groups comprising over 5,000 Chinese. “On any given day, we have about 1,000 guests floating around in the UK.” Richard smiled, “and these groups will typically spend over a billion pounds here.”

Vision

Talking about his third five-year plan, Richard told me that they will continue to develop service products through online and social media in this phase. A ten-strong team looking after their online back office is testament to his vision and commitment.

Both active in the same Anglo-Chinese business circles, Richard Song and I have collaborated for many years and I am always im-

“If an employee comes up with great ideas, then I support them; if they are followers but diligent, I guide them. But I can't tolerate laziness.”

pressed by the efficiency, positivity and helpfulness of his staff. He is rightly proud of the fact that a third of them have worked for him for more than 10 years, another third for five. This has everything to do with his management style. “If an employee comes up with great ideas, then I support them; if they are followers but diligent, I guide them. But I can't tolerate laziness.” When asked what the secret to his success is, his answer is: “diligence”.

Close attachment

As well as running ACE, Song also owns an art school in Kaifeng where over 1,000 pupils are taught by 100 teachers over four campuses. The school is the after-school study camp, compulsory for primary school pupils and many of his childhood friends' children attend. I know how important it is for him to be able to give back to his hometown and his friends there.

As for his own family, he has a house in the UK and is planning to give his son the best education the country can offer. Having worked here for so long, Richard Song has a close attachment to what he regards as his home from home.

Yintong Betser is managing director of ACTIVE Anglo Chinese Communications connecting businesses cross culture with PR and marketing. She has published a series of books on doing business in China.
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INSIDE

London's recruitment
challenge

Pages 10-11



COVER STORY

Khan talks business

Pages 4-5




14-15 Who's who in the new government Key figures in the PM's cabinet profiled by Nadine Tewfik-Saad

Regulars


LCCI trade missions
Asia and the Middle East **Page 16**

Overseas business opportunities **Page 17**

Events Networking opportunities in the extensive LCCI programme **Pages 22-24**

 **Two minute interview**
Tony Matharu, businessman and philanthropist **Page 28**

Staying in town
Amba Charing Cross **Page 41**

 **Enterprise Europe Network**
News and events **Pages 48-50**

New members
Who has joined the LCCI in the last month? **Page 51-52**



BREXIT UPDATE

Trade – business needs confidence to engage
Page 16

Brexit Q&A
Possibilities abound but no deal looms
Pages 30-31

Preparing for no deal
Page 32

Relocation?
How to make your decision
Page 33

Front cover: Mayor Sadiq Khan at City Hall. Photograph by Damian Walker

Features



Open House 2019
See hidden London architectural jewels

8



London – a smarter city?
Simon Neate and Rod Hogarth on the capital's role in the digital revolution

12



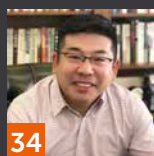
Durban
First stop for business

18



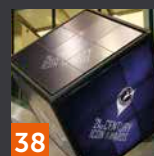
El Salvador
Evolution in Central America

20



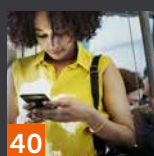
China business
Yintong Betser meets Richard Song

34



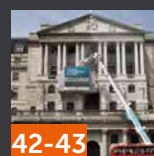
Going global
Celebrating the latest generation of business icons

38



What's your story?
Animation, video and business comms

40



Building
City of London's quiet revolution

42-43

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